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Cindy Kozal  
*Loyola Marymount University*

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*Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Loyola Marymount University Theological Studies*

## **The Body of Christ as Community: Does a Patriarchal Hierarchy Make Sense for the Body of Christ?**

By Cindy Kozal

**Abstract:** This paper examines what it means to be Church. It looks briefly at the idea of what was Church prior to Vatican II and then addresses the vision of Vatican II's Church by looking at the document *Lumen Gentium*. It then turns to the 2014 document *Sensus Fidei*, which builds upon some of the discussion of the People of God. Richard Gaillardetz offers an important vision of Vatican II and a model of the noncompetitive church. While pneumatology is not the main focus, it can hardly be avoided as *Lumen Gentium* is filled with references to the working of the Holy Spirit when discussing the Church. The paper takes a feminist approach to better understand what is meant by the People of God and the Body of Christ as developed in the council. The concern is that this model of Church offered in *Lumen Gentium* is both patriarchal and hierarchal and is not life-giving to the Body of Christ. Ultimately, the model of the Trinity as *perichōrēsis*, relationship, provides a way to envision Church in a noncompetitive model which will speak to the entire people of God.

**Keywords:** Ecclesiology, Vatican II, Feminist Theology

*Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Loyola Marymount University Theological Studies*

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I grew up in a Catholic family who never, ever, missed Mass in a post-Vatican II Church. I have never heard Mass in Latin or, as a woman, had to cover my hair when I went to Mass. I grew up unaware that I had no voice in the Church. I had a voice in my family and I expected I would have a voice in the world I lived in. As I stepped into the world, I began to realize that although I am white and thus privileged in my interactions, I am also a woman and my movement is limited. I have never been turned away from receiving the Eucharist as some black men and women have been. I have never been turned away from religious education because I do not speak the language as many Spanish speaking families may have been. But I have been told that my choices in helping with the Church stopped before the altar. As a woman, I am only welcome so far within the Church and my voice is subdued in the context of the greater Church.

I have been in ministry at my parish for 24 years and I have been employed by the Catholic Church since 2005. Since starting in ministry, both liturgical and catechetical, I have made an intentional effort to grow in my faith by learning and understanding what it means to be Catholic and how to participate in the mission of the Church. In reading the documents from Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), I gain a deeper understanding of what the Body of Christ as Church is and yet I question whether the vision professed in Vatican II has truly been realized. As Richard Gaillardetz notes "The imposing shadow...cast by the hierocratic form of the Church..." makes any sort sharing of responsibility by the People of God spoken of in the council difficult at best.<sup>1</sup> The voice of the faithful, so eloquently envisioned in *Lumen Gentium* as a shared voice, is really squashed in the current structure. The full Body of Christ has no voice in the decisions, teachings or other parts of the hierarchy which are separate from the laity. Even more so, as a woman, I am only partially able to participate in the Body of Christ since an involvement in the body of Christ is limited to areas where men allow us to participate.

In this paper, I will focus on ecclesiology as I develop an understanding of what it means to be Church. I will briefly look at the idea of what was Church prior to Vatican II and then address the vision of Vatican II's Church by looking at the document *Lumen Gentium*. I will also look at the 2014 document *Sensus Fidei*, which builds upon some of the discussion of the People of God. I turn to Richard Gaillardetz for his vision of Vatican II and look at his model of the noncompetitive church. While pneumatology is not my main focus, it can hardly be avoided as *Lumen Gentium* is filled with references to the working of the Holy Spirit when discussing the Church. I will use the feminist approach to better understand what is meant by the People of God

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis and the Renewal of Catholicism*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015), 69.



and the Body of Christ as developed in the council. My concern is that this model of Church offered in *Lumen Gentium* is both patriarchal and hierarchal and is not life-giving to the Body of Christ. I believe the model of the Trinity as *perichōrēsis*, relationship, provides a way to envision Church in a noncompetitive model which will speak to the entire people of God.

## **Pre-Vatican II**

The Church has been structured in many different ways and the “first-century Church was a reality much more complex and diverse than frequently realized.”<sup>2</sup> When we speak of the tradition of the Church and actually look back to how Churches were arranged and supported, we find a wide variety. The early Church described themselves as “hodos,” or the way, and Koinonia,” or community.<sup>3</sup> This early understanding of Church as community and following the way of Christ was decentralized. As Michael Fahey explains, it is difficult to follow and understand the “shifting nature of local churches...” for any one person because “much of what was written by Catholics and non-Catholics alike about this period in the past was one-sided and apologetical/confessional.”<sup>4</sup> Churches were unified in spirit, but not in practice.

In Paul’s letters to various Churches, we gain an understanding of the early conception of Church as he speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ with Christ as the head of the Church (Eph 1:22) Those members should act with humility “for as in one body, we have many members and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another” (Rom 12:3-5). These earliest of Churches saw themselves as unified in Christ, and yet thanks to the Deutero-Pauline letter to Timothy, we see structures being put in place as well as women being put in their place in a patriarchal society: “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent” (1Tim 2:11-12). Women, who had been with Jesus all throughout his ministry, at the cross and at the tomb witnessing the resurrection, were to be silent. This silence certainly was not something that was modeled or taught by Jesus, but imposed by the patriarchal society in which the Church was expanding. The Body of Christ in which we are “no longer Jew or Greek, ...no longer slave or free...no longer male and female; for all...are one in Christ Jesus...” now holds members who are silenced (Gal 3:28).

The Council of Nicaea held in the fourth century was the first of many councils which gathered to dispute controversies and heresies within the universal Church. Gaillardetz writes,

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Fahey, “Church,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 331.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.



*Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Loyola Marymount University Theological Studies*

“...there was general agreement that for the decrees of a council to have binding doctrinal force there needed to be a twofold consensus: first, a consensus with the faith of the ancient church...and, second, a consensus among the churches...that the teachings in fact expressed their faith.”<sup>5</sup> The Churches had to agree to what was determined in the councils. In discussing how the early Church understood the voice of the faithful, the 2014 Church document *Sensus Fedei* states: “To resolve disputes among the faithful, the Church Fathers appealed not only to common belief but also to the constant tradition of practice” (SF 24). This model differs greatly from the idea currently held by most Catholics - that the magisterium, “that group of persons entrusted with the task of overseeing and articulating official Church teaching,” holds the “authentic teaching of the hierarchy.”<sup>6</sup>

The early Church began as smaller local Churches, but as the Church grew larger, there became a need to formalize doctrine and structures. The Church began to look more hierarchical and patriarchal as they mimicked the western social systems. In the second millennium, the Church underwent reforms to reduce the influence of the nobility as well as to define papal authority. This paper can only touch upon the history of the Church and the development of the magisterium, but it is necessary to understand that these reforms led to an increased hierarchical structure and “many of the medievals conceived the church as a mirror of the celestial ‘hierarchy.’”<sup>7</sup> In this patriarchal structure, the exclusion of women increased since movement into the *ecclesia docens* (teaching church) was blocked. Ordination was the only path to being part of the decision-making body of the Church. The history of the Church has led us to where we are today. Women do not have a voice in the history of the Church and in establishing the official teachings of the Church, only men are given this privilege and power.<sup>8</sup>

## **Lumen Gentium and Sensus Fedei**

*Lumen Gentium*, one of the primary documents promulgated by Pope Paul VI from the Second Vatican Council, begins with a flowery description of the mystery of the Church. It is a mystery not to be solved but one in which we are constantly looking at to gain new understanding. We begin by hearing that “the Church is in Christ like a sacrament...and an

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<sup>5</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority?: Foundations for Understanding Authority in the Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2018), 99.

<sup>6</sup> Fahey, “Church,” 351-352.

<sup>7</sup> Gaillardetz, *Unfinished Council*, 10

<sup>8</sup> The theological anthropology of the scholastic period considered women as more embodied and less intellectual which had an enormous impact on the way women were listened to and the way they were “allowed” to participate in the Body of Christ, Church. When theologians who have a significant impact on Church teaching considered women to be misbegotten males, as was the theological anthropology of Thomas Aquinas, there leaves very little room for women to be taken seriously. (See *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Q. 92, Article 1, reply 1.)

*Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Loyola Marymount University Theological Studies*



*Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Loyola Marymount University Theological Studies*

instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG 1). The mystery of the Church is that we are both an instrument of God and for the unity of all people and this has been true since its beginning in Scripture. As *Lumen Gentium* reminds us, the seed has been planted and those who hear become part of the “flock of Christ” (LG 5). The source of our gifts for building the kingdom of God is the Holy Spirit which helps the Church to faithfully guard and share Jesus’ teachings (LG 5). The Spirit of God given through Jesus is what empowers us, this mystery of the Trinity, to be the Body of Christ. “Through Baptism we are formed in the likeness of Christ: ‘For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body’” (LG 7). The council continues to explain that the Church is actually made up of the People of God and we are the Body of Christ with Christ as our head. This “Mystical Body of Christ” is actually a constructed of “various members and functions [and each] have their part to play” (LG 7). Those with holy orders, part of the apostolic succession, actually have a special gift to offer the body of Christ. The Church goes from being the Body of Christ to being a “society structured with hierarchical organs” which should not be looked upon as different levels or ways of being the Body of Christ, but “rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element” (LG7). We are one body, all important in our own way and brought together through the divine spirit of God. Although there is no differentiation between male and female explicitly stated, the hierarchal organs are meant to be men.

Once the communal nature of Church as the Body of Christ is established in *Lumen Gentium*, the council emphasizes it is through the Sacraments that the Body of Christ is “fortified...and called by the Lord, each in his own way, to perfect holiness...” (LG11). Together as an entire Church, as one voice through the strengthening of the Spirit by the Sacraments and the gifts given by Holy Spirit, we “cannot err in matters of belief. [The faithful] manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples’ supernatural discernment in matters of faith when ‘from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful’ they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals” (LG 12). This concept is not new in that the sense of the faithful often gave rise to Church teaching, not the other way around. “In the first five centuries, the faith of the Church as a whole proved decisive in determining the canon of Scripture and in defining major doctrines concerning, for example, the divinity of Christ, the perpetual virginity and divine motherhood of Mary, and the veneration and invocation of the saints” (SF 26). We have lost this understanding of the Church working as one and have turned over the teaching authority to the hierarchy.

The council has us take a step back from the communal concept of the body of Christ and recognize that the faithful is “fully incorporated in the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ...who rules her *through* (emphasis added) the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops” (LG 14). What keeps us together as Church, as the body of Christ, is not just the spirit of God with Christ as our head, but it is “faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical government and

*Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Loyola Marymount University Theological Studies*

*Volume 4, Issue 1, June 2021*

*Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles*





communion” (LG 14). There is a difference within the body based upon the hierarchical structure referred to as the laity and those men upon whom the sacrament of holy orders is conferred. Each person, through Baptism, is anointed as priest, prophet and king so that we can make life holy, share the message of God and gather people into one kingdom of God. Once the council establishes the unity of the Church as one body, with Christ as its head, and the important role of the people of God as members of the Church, we move into the role of the hierarchy. Chapter III explains that those men who, through holy orders, have an order amongst themselves as Bishop, priest and deacons who, are under the guidance of the Pope and together they govern the Church, they act as “head.” Because of this great duty to lead the flock, so to speak, we are reminded that the apostles were given this power to lead by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and that has been passed on to through generations by the laying on of hands in the celebration of Holy Orders, which is reserved for men exclusively. This Sacrament “also confers the office of teaching and of governing, which, however, of its very nature, can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head (the Pope) and the members of the college (of bishops)” (LG 21). This conferral of grace to be able to teach and govern is miraculous indeed and again, is only available to men. This same Holy Spirit is poured out on everyone at their Baptism and in all the Sacraments.

Documents such as *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (AA) written after *Lumen Gentium* have worked to strengthen the understanding of laity’s role. The laity is exhorted to use our gifts wisely for the service of Christ, never separate from the Church. In *Sensus Fidei*, we are told “the faithful have an instinct for the truth of the Gospel, which enables them to recognize and endorse authentic Christian doctrine and practice, and to reject what is false. That supernatural instinct intrinsically linked to the gift of faith received in the communion of the Church... enables Christians to fulfil their prophetic calling” (SF 8). The *sensus fidei* works within the individual believer on a personal level as well as on a communal level working within the Church. The gifts of the Holy Spirit which are given to the laity and their *sensus fidei* should make for a hierarchy that listens to its people, not promulgates without being in dialogue with the faithful.

### **In Baptism: Priest, Prophet, King**

Richard Gaillardetz is a theologian who recognized the work of the Holy Spirit within the Second Vatican Council. He writes, “One of the most important and frequently overlooked contributions of the Second Vatican Council lay in the decisive steps the council took toward recovering the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.”<sup>9</sup> Recognizing the pneumatology of the Second Vatican Council, Gaillardetz explains that through the power of the Holy Spirit,

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Gaillardetz and Catherine Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking Vatican II* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 58.



the Baptized become part of the Body of Christ and it is where the faithful receive their Christian identity first in life. Our first priority is our Baptism, which brings us into communion with the entire body of Christ as the Church through the Holy Spirit. "The Church exists to draw us into life-giving relationship with God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit."<sup>10</sup> We saw that *Lumen Gentium* begins by referring to the Church as a sacrament in communion both with God and in unity with the people of God: "In these few words it lays out the very high calling of the Christian community: we are called to be a living example of the unity God desires for the whole human community."<sup>11</sup>

The councils' frequent referral in *Lumen Gentium* to the Holy Spirit as dwelling within the Church and the People of God offers a way to bridge the gap between the ordained ministry and the laity. "By employing the *tria munera* (threefold office of Christ) the council grounded the entire Church, and not just the clergy, in the missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers all the baptized to participate in the work of Christ as priest, prophet and king. Again, this applies to all the faithful."<sup>12</sup> All the faithful are called to the mission of the Church and we have a responsibility as baptized to that mission. Gaillardetz sees this as a noncompetitive and in fact, humble, way of being Church. Just as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, we all have gifts and all gifts are needed in the body of Christ; all of the faithful, together through the power of the Holy Spirit, build the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-30). In *Lumen Gentium*, the discussion of the mystery of the Church as Sacrament and the People of God baptized into the Body of Christ comes before the discussion of the hierarchy. "Its placement before the chapter on the hierarchy suggested a recovery of the convictions of the early Church that the ministry of the hierarchy must be seen within the context of the common dignity of all the baptized."<sup>13</sup> We need each other and we are to be in communion with one another through the power of the Holy Spirit.

By reminding us that we, clergy and lay, are all baptized into the *tria munera*, Vatican II provided a challenge to the conception of Church as two separate parts and reminds us that we are one through "the priority of Christian Baptism."<sup>14</sup> The emphasis we find is one of reciprocity. "One of the ways in which the council was able to get beyond the charisms vs. office binary was to stress the reciprocal relationship that obtains between the two terms...The pastoral leadership of the ordained need not compete with the exercise of the many gifts of the faithful."<sup>15</sup> One gift is not more important than the other, they are all necessary to the Church and the gifts

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>14</sup> Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, 58.

<sup>15</sup> Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 62.





are given through the Holy Spirit. How can one person say their gifts are superior, if all gifts are given through the Holy Spirit? As Gaillardetz writes, “The council successfully transcended any competition between charism and office by stressing their mutual dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.”<sup>16</sup> Without the Holy Spirit working in the Church, nothing would be accomplished. A Church modeled on humility in recognizing our gifts are limited and we need each other as well leads to a reciprocal relationship within the Church because, as Gaillardetz says, “Each requires the other.”<sup>17</sup>

This ideal Church presented in *Lumen Gentium* is an ideal version of the Body of Christ working together for the good of all, recognizing the gifts of each of the faithful, listening and responding to the *sensus fidei*, but it has not been achieved. It is a work in progress with many obstacles, according to Gaillardetz: “Theologians have seen this emphasis on the Church as communion as an antidote to an excessive preoccupation with rank, power, jurisdiction and clerical privilege in the church.”<sup>18</sup> Letting go of the privilege of position as well as honoring the *sensus fidei* can be difficult and uncomfortable because it requires a change. As he says, “Particularly during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, we encountered church leaders employing a more confrontational rhetoric...”<sup>19</sup> Many of the documents since Vatican II which address questions of the laity “reinforced the ontological divide between the clergy and the laity.”<sup>20</sup> This runs counter to the vision of Pope John XXIII when he addresses the opening of the council. Gaillardetz reminds us that in his opening address to the council, Pope John XXIII explained “what the Church needed...was a teaching authority that was ‘pastoral in character.’”<sup>21</sup>

Working within a patriarchal and hierarchal structure, it is difficult to remember that we should not be drawing lines separating the haves (clerics) and the have nots (the laity). When teaching appears confrontational and there is a “preoccupation with maintaining a distinct clerical identity, often at the expense of solidarity with the Whole people of God,” clericalism becomes a problem.<sup>22</sup> Listening and reciprocity are the exception, not the rule, as there is no path for dialogue between the laity and those that consider their role as ordained to rule over the laity. As Gaillardetz writes, “By Baptism...all of us are called to live in persona Christi; the priest is ordained into a distinctive relationship to Christ’s Body, the Church...The priest is “head: as Christ is “head,” not as one to be served but as one called to serve...”<sup>23</sup> A Church of mutual service, listening and reciprocating was envisioned in *Lumen Gentium* and *Sensus Fidei*.

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<sup>16</sup> Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, 103.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>18</sup> Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 60.

<sup>19</sup> Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, 69.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>21</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, “A More Pastoral Magisterium,” *Commonweal*, January 27, 2017, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, “A Church in Crisis,” *Worship* 93 (July 2019): 209.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 214.



*Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Loyola Marymount University Theological Studies*

## **All Parts Being Equal**

I have looked at the understanding of Church and the use of the term “Body of Christ” from the early Church to the Second Vatican Council. My ecclesiology is informed by the lens of feminist thought since my vision of Church is colored by the work and ministry I do as a woman within the constraints of the hierarchical Church. I looked at the wording from the first three chapters of *Lumen Gentium* to see where the Holy Spirit is at work and what is meant by Church as the Body of Christ. I am concerned both with ecclesiology, but also pneumatology and how the Holy Spirit is understood to work within the Church. In this section, I hope to make clear my understanding of the limiting use of the term Body of Christ as it is organized within Church today, and I propose a model of Church as community which lives out Paul’s message to the early Church.

In the teaching from Vatican II and subsequent documents on the laity, the magisterium speaks in eloquent terms of the Body of Christ, the Church, as priest, prophet and king through baptism. The ecclesiological image we get is of a Church community whose members have gifts that work together to make “the body” function. But then the council takes a leap to divide the People of God into the ministerial priesthood with sacred power and the laity who enjoy a common priesthood (LG 10). This difference in essence of our priesthood sets aside the priesthood of the laity and privileges the ordained priesthood, open to only men, for all leadership roles and official teaching duties. This separation builds a wall between laity and clerics leaving behind real participation in the structure of the Church, and especially for women. The silence, encouraged in the letter to Timothy, continues.

The men creating these documents do so in a vacuum, in a world which does not include women. Although there are new translations of the Second Vatican Council documents in inclusive language, reading the documents as posted on the Vatican website in their original intended form is disconcerting for women. We find the Holy Spirit often referred to in female gender in Scripture, yet Church documents use exclusively male language. This lack of inclusivity is difficult because “male images allow men to participate fully in it, while women can do so only by abstracting themselves from their concrete, bodily identity as women.”<sup>24</sup> How are we supposed to see ourselves functioning within the Body of Christ when the language used is clearly oriented toward men? We have to look past the language, ignore the mindset of the men writing the documents and ignore the anthropology of the early Church fathers to see women’s place, which seems like a lot of work to do for women to feel included. We know this is not the model of Jesus’ earthly life as he walked with women, spoke with women, received

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<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, “Naming God She: The Theological Implications” (lecture, University of Pennsylvania, October 19, 2000), Boardman Lectureship in Christian Ethics, <https://repository.upenn.edu/boardman/5>, 13.



help from women and appeared to women: "...[T]hrough historical critical research we know that Jesus had women disciples...and that he dealt with them as he dealt with male disciples. This historical fact of Jesus' egalitarian practice continues to challenge the discrimination against women Christians by the official Church."<sup>25</sup> We see one way of being and interacting given to us through Jesus' example in the gospels, but a different model developed by the Apostles. The path of a patriarchal Church is modeled on the society of the time, not on Jesus' example.<sup>26</sup>

Looking at Scripture, we can see that Paul, in writing on the idea of Church communities, recognized the variety of gifts of the spirit each person has. We are given different gifts of the Holy Spirit and we all have a part to play, but the key is that we are all needed and we need to work together. Any division or placement of one part as higher than the other makes for a poorly functioning body. If we are one body in Christ, then all parts should be of equal importance as Paul states, "As it is, there are many members yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'..." (1 Cor 12:20-21). And yet, this is precisely what the hierarchy is doing when they say "I have no need of you" to women in the teaching and governing body of the Church. The Catholic Church may look at itself as a Church in communion through the power of the Holy Spirit, but women have no place at the communion table – the communion table where decisions are made, Sacramental life is conferred, theology is debated and Church teaching is promulgated.

Implementation of the ideals of a reciprocal relationship between the laity and the hierarchy offered in *Lumen Gentium* has fallen short. As Pope Benedict XVI indicated in his address to open the convention in Rome on Church Membership and Pastoral- Co-responsibility in 2009, "...we must also remember that the integration of this doctrine in procedures and its consequent assimilation in the fabric of ecclesial awareness did not happen always and everywhere without difficulty and in accordance with a correct interpretation."<sup>27</sup> In this same address, he says that "[the laity] must no longer be viewed as 'collaborators' of the clergy but truly recognized as 'co-responsible', for the Church's being and action..."<sup>28</sup> The problem is not necessarily with the laity, but with the hierarchical ecclesial structure. Gaillardetz explains that when the language of the Church imposes the subordination of the laity, particularly women, "...one easily ends up simply reinforcing the hierocratic, pyramidal view of the Church that is so

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<sup>25</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), xxvii.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, "Envisioning the Church Women Want" (lecture, Boston College, April 2004), Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Boston College, April 2007, <https://youtu.be/-wPmyVJzWf8>.

<sup>27</sup> Benedict XVI, "Opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome on the Theme: 'Church Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility'" (Address, May 26, 2009, Basilica of St. John Lateran), [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20090526\\_convegno-diocesi-rm.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090526_convegno-diocesi-rm.html).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 4.



central to the Church's long standing hierocratic form."<sup>29</sup> The clergy protects the clergy, and until we see a change in the formation in our seminaries and a change in how we act as Church, the systems will be maintained. If we look at the example of sexual abuse in the Church, there is clearly something wrong in a system which is not accountable to anyone except themselves.

Looking at the Church as an institution instead of as the Body of Christ, we can easily lose sight of our responsibility in the mission of Christ. We speak of the authority of the Church, but where does that authority come from? In her lecture at Boston College in 2004, Elizabeth Johnson reminds us all that "there is ultimately only one source of authority in the Church, namely the Spirit of God, the giver of life and the source of all love."<sup>30</sup> The Holy Spirit given to us at baptism is the same spirit for all. "It is a truism that baptism does not discriminate. The way it is administered and its effects are the same for all. Consider what this means for the religious identity of women."<sup>31</sup> We should be given a place at the table, as part of the teaching body of the Church, our voices and intellect recognized. I know far too many women who have walked away from the Church seeing no hope for change, no hope for their voice to be honored.

The documents of Vatican II give many clear references to the Holy Spirit working in the Church. If we look at the working of the Trinity as *perichōrēsis*, we develop a sense of a divinity that works with each other, encircling each other, supporting each other in a complex way that is mystery.<sup>32</sup> If we are looking to the spirit to support us and encircle us and strengthen us, then why not look to the way the Trinity works within itself for a model of Church? In the Trinity, God is not better than Jesus or than Spirit; there is no hierarchy but a mutuality which is life giving. By re-thinking the hierarchical structure, not as a pyramid but as the symbol for infinity ∞, we can imagine the Church as the Body of Christ with no divisions, a community in communion with all who have yet to come and all who have gone before us, working together to share the Gospel, listening to each other so all are included, accountable to each other in union with the source of all our earthly authority, the Holy Spirit. This is *perichōrēsis*, this is the dance. There is no clerical privilege or culture in the path of infinity's symbol, just as in the Trinity. Change is difficult, but unless we find a way to be inclusive and accountable to the entire body of the Church, there will not be room for the Holy Spirit to flourish. My hope is in the Triune God – Spirit, Christ, Creator – in whom nothing is impossible, if we can just get out of the way.

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<sup>29</sup> Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, 105.

<sup>30</sup> Johnson, "Envisioning the Church Women Want."

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, "'Your One Wild and Precious Life': Women on the Road to Ministry," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2019): 207.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theology* (Chestnut Ridge: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 231.



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